PUBLIC OPINION

IN AUSTRIA ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS

The UN Department of Public Information commissioned a public opinion poll in Austria to assess the awareness, knowledge and image of the UN. The poll was carried out during November 1990–January 1991.

■ THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

- Almost everyone in Austria has heard of the United Nations.
- The majority of Austrians have a good opinion of the performance of the Organization.
- Protection of the environment and the promotion of international peace and security are the two UN issues of greatest interest to Austria.

AWARENESS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

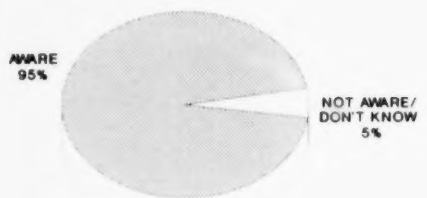


FIGURE 1

AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE UN

Ninety-five per cent of Austrians have heard of the UN. Awareness levels are high in all demographic subgroups; only amongst those aged over 60 and those with the lowest level of education does awareness fall below the 90 per cent mark.

Forty-two per cent of Austrians are able to name a UN institution or body. UNICEF, UNESCO, UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, which has its headquarters in Vienna) and WHO are the most well-known UN agencies. In Austria, as the UN has found in other polls conducted in European countries, knowledge of UN institutions is related to education: those with the highest levels have greater recall and a wider repertoire of agencies known.

UNITED NATIONS ISSUE NO. 16–AUGUST 1991

ABILITY TO NAME A UN INSTITUTION

FIGURE 2

UN PERFORMANCE RATING

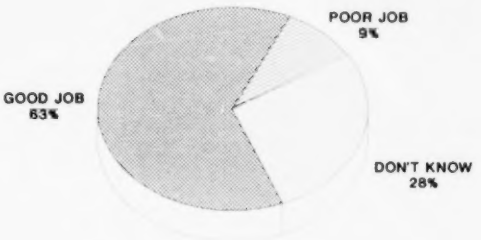


FIGURE 4

IDENTIFYING UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

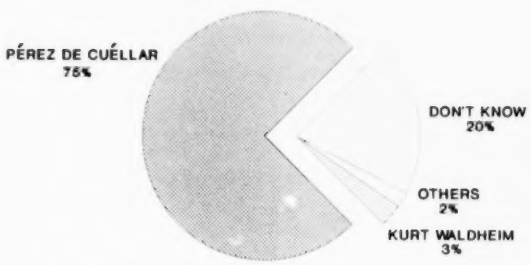


FIGURE 3

IDENTIFICATION OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Three-quarters of the Austrian population know that Javier Pérez de Cuéllar is the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Of the remaining quarter, most do not know who is Secretary-General, but a very small minority of Austrians (3 per cent of the sample) think that it is still Kurt Waldheim.

RATING UN PERFORMANCE

A majority of Austrians (63 per cent) think that the United Nations is doing a good job in handling the problems it has had to face. Nine per cent think that it is performing poorly. The others polled either were not aware of the Organization or were not able to express an opinion on its performance.

REASONS FOR UN PERFORMANCE RATING

The most common reason given for positively evaluating the United Nations was its role in peace-keeping and conflict resolution. Its activities to increase international understanding and its role in the welfare of children, human rights and disarmament were also mentioned.

Reasons for saying the UN is doing a poor job related mostly to a perceived lack of effectiveness. Respondents criticized the failure of the UN to avert wars, and the use of the veto in the Security Council.

A sizeable proportion of respondents (14 per cent) mentioned the part the UN played during the situation between Iraq and Kuwait when rating the performance of the Organization. The overwhelming majority, almost 90 per cent, thought that the situation was well handled by the United Nations.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

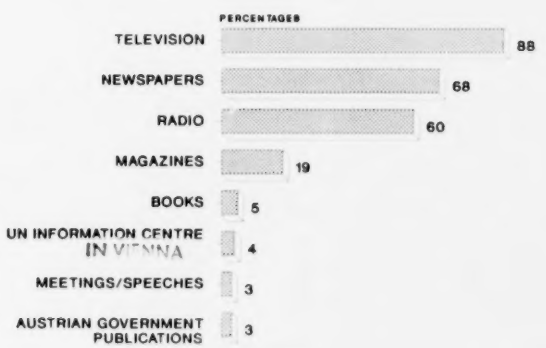
Television is the most widely used medium in Austria for finding out about the activities of the United Nations, followed by newspapers, radio and magazines. For those with the highest level of education, newspapers are more widely used than television.

Just over a third of Austrians recall being taught about the United Nations at school. Most of the teaching takes place at the secondary level. Amongst those who attended university, less than two per cent recall any teaching about the United Nations.

INTEREST IN UN ISSUES

Protection of the environment and international peace and security are the two UN issues in which Austrians show most interest: four-fifths

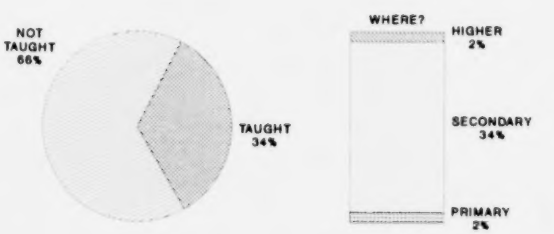
SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON THE UN



(NB. RESPONDENTS COULD NAME MORE THAN ONE)

FIGURE 5

TEACHING ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS



(NB. RESPONDENTS COULD INDICATE MORE THAN ONE LEVEL OF EDUCATION)

FIGURE 6

of respondents are very interested in receiving more information about these topics. Human rights, disarmament, crime prevention and drug abuse are also of interest. African Economic Recovery, the international debt crisis, a new world information order and decolonization are the issues which excite least interest among Austrians.

INTEREST IN UNITED NATIONS ISSUES

	VERY INTERESTED %	SOMEWHAT INTERESTED %	NOT INTERESTED %
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION	86	11	3
INT'L PEACE AND SECURITY	86	11	3
HUMAN RIGHTS	76	20	4
DISARMAMENT	67	27	5
CRIME PREVENTION	62	30	7
DRUG ABUSE	60	30	10
REFUGEES & DISASTER RELIEF	59	33	7
WORLD FOOD PROBLEMS	57	35	7
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION	53	38	8
CHILDREN'S ISSUES	52	36	11
AIDS	50	35	14
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	49	41	9
EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN	44	42	13
THE WORK OF THE UN IN GENERAL	42	46	11
APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA	38	44	17
TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT	35	51	13
IMPROVING HOUSING CONDITIONS	35	48	16
POPULATION ISSUES	34	50	15
INT'L LAW & TREATIES	30	49	20
AFRICAN ECONOMIC RECOVERY	29	52	19
INT'L DEBT CRISIS	25	52	22
NEW WORLD INFORMATION ORDER	19	52	27
DECOLONIZATION	18	52	29

(NB. SOME RESPONDENTS INDICATED "DON'T KNOW" OR GAVE NO ANSWER TO SOME OF THE ISSUES)

FIGURE 7

HOW THE POLL WAS DONE

The poll was conducted in Austria by Fessel & GFK. They interviewed a nationwide representative sample of 2,000 men and women aged 14 and over. The interviews were carried out face-to-face in respondents' homes during November 1990 to January 1991. The margin of sampling error is estimated at ± 3 per cent.

The Programme Evaluation and Communications Research Unit of the United Nations Department of Public Information undertakes public opinion polls to "analyze trends of public opinion throughout the world about the activities of the United Nations and the extent to which an informed understanding of the work of the United Nations is being secured". General Assembly resolution 13(1), paragraph 13, Annex 1 of 13 February 1946.

CONCLUSIONS

The United Nations is well known in Austria, and most Austrians think that it is dealing well with the problems it faces. The majority of those who commented positively on the Organization's performance mentioned its handling of the situation between Iraq and Kuwait. The work the UN is doing to protect the environment is of equally high interest to Austrians as well as its more visible endeavours in the field of international peace and security.

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UNITED NATIONS

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